December 3, 2020

To the Graduate Program:

This project, entitled "Using the Renaissance Accelerated Reader Program to Improve Student Performance in Reading Comprehension" and written by Yaodong Li, is presented to the Graduate Program of Greensboro College. I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a Major in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

_____
Michelle Plaisance, Advisor

We have reviewed this
Project and recommend its
acceptance

_____
Michelle Plaisance,
Director, Graduate Program in TESOL

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Kathleen Keating
Chair, Department of English

Accepted for the Graduate Program

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Jane C. Girardi

USING THE RENAISSANCE ACCELERATED READER PROGRAM TO IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN READING COMPREHENSION

Presented to
The Graduate Program of
Greensboro College

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in
Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

by
Yaodong Li

December 2020

Advisor: Michelle Plaisance

Abstract

Reading comprehension is a foundationally essential skill for all students. Although it is true that students with poor reading proficiencies can be found in all groups, a National Assessment of Education Progress report indicated a wide achievement gap between ELL students and their native English speaking counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Poor reading performance in elementary and secondary schools not only slows students' language development, but affects students understanding of content subjects and potentially leads to failure in higher education as well. The benefits of independent reading to language acquisition has been obvious to both educators and students. More independent reading could improve students' reading comprehension and vocabulary which lead to better reading performance which in turn motivates healthier reading habits. Engaging students, especially students with limited reading proficiencies, in independent reading has remained a challenge for various reasons. A workshop for an online reading management program named Renaissance Accelerated Reader (AR) is presented in this paper to educators whose students are presumed to already have access to this program. The workshop provides a detailed program orientation and a step-by-step tutorial for its implementation in the hope that teachers use AR as a supplementary program to improve students' English reading comprehension through more self-paced independent reading.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my parents who have been living in a rural area in China all their lives but have always supported me and my sister to pursue our dreams, however far away they may seem. Neither of them received high school education, but they have had the foresight to encourage their children to complete higher education. I would have dropped out of high school if had not been for them.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Michelle Plaisance and her team for the support and encouragement they have given me throughout my graduate studies. Your dedication and patience made the seemingly impossible task for a non-native English speaking student to complete a master's degree in TESOL in the United States possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Lee and Buxton (2013) observed that the population of culturally and linguistically diverse students in the United States has been consistently on the rise. High academic achievement standards are expected from all students; meanwhile, English language learners have the disadvantage of having to learn the various school subjects in a new or non-native language. This disadvantage naturally creates an achievement gap between English language learners and native English speaking students.

In order to bridge the gaps, it is unwise for school systems to "water-down" the curriculum for English language learners, which would inevitably result in larger achievement gaps; the more sensible route to take is to improve students' literacy in the target language. According to Lee and Buxton (2013), teachers of English language learners find themselves facing double challenges: teaching the content standards across subject areas and facilitating English language and literacy development. As a teacher who has been working with students who are learning their subject areas in a foreign language, I find myself wholeheartedly agreeing with these observations and constantly seeking effective methods and programs to improve students' language proficiency.

I am currently teaching Chinese Immersion in an international elementary school in North Carolina. Students in this program learn their core subjects such as Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science in Chinese, which is their target language. A constant challenge in this program is that students have trouble working independently on assignments with only Chinese

instructions. This is similar to the challenge that non-native English speaking students face in regular schools; the only difference is the target language.

Before I came to teach Chinese Immersion, I worked with small groups of Chinese students who were attending international schools where all subjects were taught in English. One of my former students was having a hard time in Biology. I asked him to bring an assignment to our English class and he did. Once we went over the questions he was able to give the answers immediately. The student believed that he was struggling in Biology; the truth was that he did not comprehend Biology in English.

Researchers and educators of various backgrounds have been "searching for instruction insights to promote ELL students' learning" (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2019). There is not one single solution to an issue so complicated. Educational approaches with different foci such as technology, community building, individualized lesson planning, and vocabulary tools have all brought about success to specific groups of students. What particularly attracts my attention is a computer-based, leveled reading program called Renaissance Accelerated Reader (https://www.renaissance.com/).

Despite its comparatively long history (34 years) as an online learning program, Renaissance Accelerated Reader is not widely known or used outside English speaking countries. I first came in contact with this program when I was interviewing for a teaching position in Shenzhen, China. Job applicants were required to complete a reading assessment prior to further evaluation. I was greatly impressed with this process because it was bias-free and the employer was able to determine the candidate's English proficiency much more accurately. Later when I learned that the program was available to assess students within the institution, I

was so excited that I wrote a 2,000 word piece of essay discussing the potential benefits of the reading program as well as reading in general.

The importance of vocabulary to reading comprehension is obvious to both teacher and students. There are common practices, however, that are problematic when it comes to building vocabulary or reading comprehension. In some cases students learn vocabulary words that are independent of reading practices. Word games such as flashcards only help with short-term memorization; students will not recognize most of the words in two weeks. In other cases students try to read books that are not meant for their reading level. Just because a six-grader can read *The Hunger Games* does not mean another six-grader will not encounter 50 new words in one page. Even if the six-graders are aware that they are not able to read *The Hunger Games*, they may not know what else they can read. They walk out of a bookstore with some books; weeks later they realize these books are not for them either.

Renaissance Accelerated Reader solves these problems almost perfectly. Students are informed of their own reading levels by completing the initial online assessments. With this information librarians or book store assistants will be able to recommend books to them. Older students may also go to websites that inform them of the detailed reading levels of the books they have in hand. Having books that are appropriate for students' reading needs ensures that students do not get frustrated by reading; building vocabulary becomes an unconscious process once students are more interested in reading.

In the second year that I came to teach in the United States I became a second-grade homeroom teacher. At the beginning of the school year, the English teacher's comment on my students was that most of the Immersion students "cannot read" and it was common for the Immersion students because they spend the most of their school hours learning in Chinese. The

English teacher assured me that the students would eventually catch up but I was deeply concerned. I did not like the idea of my students being below grade level despite their tasks of learning two languages. I prepared the students for the Renaissance Accelerated Reader program from day one. Their Star Reading (initial placement) tests were taken on the first date available; the goals were set the day they complete the assessment; their reading progress was monitored weekly; every book they finished reading was awarded; and, at the end of each quarter, we had an award ceremony. Halfway throughout the year, most students were on or above grade level. When the school year came to a closure, the English teacher commented that these students "took off" in second grade.

Based on these experiences, I developed a Renaissance Accelerated Reader workshop as my final project. In the workshop, I introduce the basic ideas, the important features as well as the hidden features of this program. Educators of English language learners, native English speakers, subject teachers, homeroom teachers, and English teachers in general will potentially benefit from this workshop so long as their students have direct or indirect access to the Renaissance Accelerated Reader program.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (Snow, 2002, p. 11). Although in modern sense reading comprehension includes readers' skills to orally read materials with accuracy and speed (Rasinski, 2009, p. 4), in this review of literature the focus was readers' silent reading fluency.

The reading comprehension process.

The definition of reading comprehension evolved in the past decades as a result of advancement in understanding the comprehension process. Gough and Tunmer (1986) proposed a simple model of reading in which reading is the product of decoding and listening comprehension. Based on this point of view a preliminary attempt was made to interpret reading disabilities as either unable to apply phonetic rules in printed words, or unable to comprehend discourses presented orally, or both.

Georgiou, Das, and Hayward (2009) argued that in this model a large portion of variance in terms of reading comprehension is un accounted for. Their study found that children with average ability to decode and converse could also exhibit poor reading comprehension, and suggested that there were other processes to consider.

Georgious, Das, and Hayward (2009) were not the only scholars who noticed the deficiency in the simple model. Pressley and Afflerbach (1996) proposed the variance in decoding skills and fluency. They suggested that readers needed sufficient vocabulary and reading experiences to assist with their reading comprehension. These prior experiences prepared them for future reading and meta-cognitive strategies that assisted with comprehension. Furthermore, the interest and motivation for reading were also factors that made a difference between poor readers and good readers.

English language learners' reading comprehension.

The number of English language learners (ELL) in the United Stated has increased significantly in recent years. In a ten year period at the beginning of the twenty-first century, over five million new English language learners joined the student population in the United States (Nakamoto et al., 2012); a large percentage of them entered their new English-speaking schools with limited English proficiencies.

Among the variety of English language skills needed for ELLs' success, reading ability is one of the most important second language skills in academic settings where English learners are required to read lesson materials and complete tasks with English instructions regardless of the content areas. Students' ability to read could be the greatest factor contributing to ELLs' academic success (Suk, 2015).

Al Khaiyali (2014) stated that reading comprehension was crucial for the development of both first language learners and second language learners. More advanced reading proficiency improved other language skills, such as writing, speaking, listening, and critical thinking. Al

Khaiyali (2014) also considered reading comprehension to be fundamental factor that could decide the success of language programs.

Reading comprehension and achievement gap.

Reading comprehension is a foundationally essential skill for all students in the United States, yet, a National Assessment of Educational Progress report stated that more than half of fourth graders in the United States were not proficient in reading (NCES, 2015). The report also found that, among the ELL students, 92% of fourth graders and 96% of eighth graders were reading below grade level. In 2011 third-grade and fourth-grade ELL students averaged a reading score that was 36 points or more below their native English speaking counterparts on state-wide standardized tests (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

In addition to poor reading proficiencies, the low assessment scores of ELLs in content areas were equally troubling for scholars. Ford-Dewaters (2017) indicated that the low assessment scores could be an obstacle that hindered ELLs in understanding of content, which consequently affected ELL's academic achievement and high-stake tests. A potential consequence of a widening achievement gap was the failure of ELLs in general education. ELLs also are less prepared for higher degrees and careers when they leave high school (Ford-Dewaters, 2017).

In order to improve ELLs' English reading performance, it is essential that elementary and secondary schools have valid assessment tools that enable educators to continuously monitor students' progress and provide reading intervention throughout the school year. The aim of these new assessment tools was to improve reading comprehension more timely and actionably than high-stakes summative assessments. (Landon, 2017)

Readability and Leveling

According to Glasswell and Ford (2010), leveling reading texts has become common practice in many elementary schools. A common feature in the various reading programs is that texts are carefully leveled to meet the developmental needs of many readers. Some leveling systems, such as Lexiles (Zakaluk & Samuels, 1995) have become so popular that they are now accepted to guide reading practices in many schools. These programs may differ in terms of "the number of levels and discrimination among them" (Glasswell & Ford, 2010, p. 57), but at the core they are all designed to classify texts into progressively connected difficulty levels for specific readers. Books are carefully scrutinized, labelled, and then sanctioned for specific readers so that the readers' reading needs and the difficulty level of the text are matched.

Definition of readability and leveling.

According to Harris and Hodges (1995), readability is defined as "the ease of comprehension because of the style of writing" (p. 203). Weaver (2000) defined leveling as "selecting books to match the competencies of a reader and writer" (p. 57). However, scholars found these definitions correct but incomplete. Fry (2002) stated that "in classrooms and publishing houses readability is often thought of an objective numerical score obtained by applying a readability formula" (p. 286); leveling was less objective, and some subjectivity of judgement should be taken into consideration.

Development of readability and leveling.

Compared to readability formulas, the practice of leveling texts has a long history (Fry, 2002). In the 18th century, new readers in the United Stated found themselves only learning the alphabet and some phrases before jumping straight into the Bible. In 1836 William Holmes McGuffey published the first leveled set of readers which has four numerical rankings (e.g., 4 was the most advanced). These early leveled reading texts were widely accepted in the 19th century and sold over 130 million copies over the next 60 years (Fry, 2002). In the early 20th century a large amount of reading series were published, and by the 1930s these books started to be graded in accordance with specific grade levels (e.g., a reader with a number 4 on it was meant for 4th graders). Later in the 20th century graded reading series lost their popularity among educators because of restricted content and controlled vocabulary in these reading textbooks.

Book leveling gained popularity again partly because of Marie Clay (1991) and her Reading Discovery system, which was successfully used as early intervention program for students who were likely to fail in reading. The emergent reader stage is crucial to a students' reading development, and educators felt the necessity to "find books with closely spaced difficulty levels, particularly at the first- and second-grade levels" (Fry, 2002, p. 287).

Traditional readability formulas, however, either lacked finer unit designations or text support for their finer units. On the one hand, formulas such as Dale-Chall (Chall & Dale 1995) only had whole grade designations at elementary school grades. On the other hand, formulas such as Gunning (Gunning, 1998) had designations in ten instructional months of a grade, while used sentence length and vocabulary as its only formula inputs. Text support factors such as content, curriculum, and language structure were not taken into consideration in most readability formulas (Fry, 2002).

The limitations to the traditional readability formulas were greatly improved by the introduction of computers. Large commercial companies could now base their formulas on much larger text samples such as the whole content of books. The companies not only developed finer unit designations, but also presented their own reading achievement tests which correlate with their newly developed readability units. Some of these reading achievement tests, including Lexiles (Zakaluk & Samuels, 1995), became so widely used that they could be correlated with any other readability units.

Mathematically developed, reading formulas enjoyed a high degree of objectivity. Different people or different computers would give the same score for the same book using the same formula. People of similar reading abilities would not get highly different scores using these computer-based assessment test (Fry, 2002). The match between the difficulty level of the book and the score of the test were so accurate that readers would almost certainly find their designated books readable.

Readability formulas, objective as they are, come with limitations. Ninth-grade teachers do not see their students read a drivers' license manual even though it has a readability level of the ninth grade. Text support factors such as motivation and appropriateness have to be taken into account when leveling books, which makes leveling less objective compared to readability. According to Fry (2002), leveling tends to be used to classify books only for lower elementary grades where the need for age-appropriate texts made the most sense to teachers. The range of readability is much wider than leveling. Readability formulas range from grade 1 through grade 12, or even through college years in some cases. In addition to classrooms, readability is also used for common reading materials such as training manuals, insurance policies, and contracts.

Renaissance Accelerated Reader

Among the well-known leveled reading programs, Renaissance Accelerated Reader is the one that promotes itself as “the nation’s most widely used reading management program” (Renaissance Learning, 2014). By word-of-mouth promotion and effective advertising, Accelerated Reader (AR) has enjoyed phenomenal popularity as either a primary or supplementary reading program in schools both in the United States and worldwide. According to Renaissance Learning (2019), more than one-third of U.S. schools, together with schools in over 90 other countries, have adopted its products.

Developed by Renaissance Learning, Inc. (www.renaissance.com), this reading management program provides children with adequate access of books, allows children to select books themselves, gives points after quizzing students on the content of the books, and then provides prizes in exchange for the points (Krashen, 2002). According to Pavonetti et al. (2002), the philosophy behind Accelerated Reader is that by using this program, students are motivated to read more books and become better readers.

Cipielewski and Stanovich (1992) stated that more reading, especially recreational reading, could improve students’ reading comprehension and vocabulary and argued that better reading performance motivated healthy reading habits, which in turn would produce lifelong readers. When the foundational skill of reading is improved, other academic domains will consequently improve in conjunction with reading skills. Paul et al. (1996) stated that even students’ attendance rates will increase as a result of improved academic achievement and self-esteem because successful students appreciate school much more than struggling students.

The program.

Accelerated Reader has been a computer-based reading program since its existence. Pavonetti et al. (2002) stated that AR included more than 50,000 computerized reading tests and quizzes. The initial reading diagnostic test is called Star Reading, which is a computer-based multiple choice testing system that assess students' literacy skill objectives. Book quizzes are also computerized in similar fashion. Reports, diagnosis, and records are available on computers for both students and teachers.

Two numbers are assigned to the books that are included in the Accelerated Reader program: reading level and AR points. Pavonetti et al. (2002) observed that different readability formulas had been adopted by Renaissance to level texts, and the Flesch-Kincaid reading index (Paul et. al, 1996) is currently being used in AR. Based on this index, a reading level number is assigned to a book with the designation of grade level, and an AR point number is assigned to the book that reflects the length and difficulty of the text. Pavonetti et al. (2002) explained these two numbers in details in their paper. For example, the award-winning book *Dear Mr. Henshaw* (Cleary, 1983), with a word count of 18,145, was designated a reading level of 4.9 (fourth grade, ninth month) and was assignment 3.0 AR points. Clifford's First Christmas (Birdwell, 1994), a much simpler book with a word count of 294, was classified as a 1.9 reading level (first grade, ninth month) and assigned 0.5 points.

Students were informed of their reading levels by the Star Reading test, and they could self-select their books that were marked with their reading level. The computerized objective tests of the AR books included 5, 10, or 20 questions, depending on the length and complexity of the book (Institute for Academic Excellence, 1998). The correct percentage score in a book quiz multiplied by the book's point value would be a student's AR points that were earned by reading

the book and completing the quiz. For example, if a student read *Dear Mr. Henshaw* (Cleary, 1983) and answered 8 out of 10 questions correctly, the student would gain 80% × 8 points = 2.4 points. A distinct feature of the AR system was that students would not get any points if their answer in a test was less than 60% correct, and they were only allowed to take the quiz for a certain book only once (Pavonetti et al. 2002). This feature prevents students from rushing through books and quizzes to gain extra points.

Zone of proximal development.

Accelerated Reader's diagnostic reports include a section named ZPD. Vygotsky (1978) proposed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory in 1978 and defined ZPD as the "actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving" and the "potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 81). Antonacci (2000) interpreted this theory as "a way of thinking about learning and development" (p. 24). For teachers, this meant knowing students' current level of development and implementing instruction slightly beyond the student' development. The ultimate goal for the teacher was to provide instructional support to further students' performance until they knew the concepts enough to function independently. In Vygotsky's (1978) view, learning a concept was a series of development on a continuum, rather than fragmented leaps between growth points. When students were learning within their zone of proximal development, they were close to being able use the concept independently; appropriate instruction was needed for emergence.

Tharp and Gallimore (1988), who studied and explained the ZPD extensively, redefined the relationship between good teaching and students' development, and stated that teaching

"consists of assisting performance through the zone of proximal development. Teaching can be said to occur when assistance is offered at points in the ZPD at which performance requires assistance" (p. 45). In this updated model, four stages of development were proposed, each stage requiring a different level of support. In Stage I (the beginning stage), explicit directions along with questions, response, and feedback were required to assist students in development of their own strategy. When students reached Stage II, students' learning became self-guided, but not yet fully developed. Teachers still provided feedback and guidance to further develop the new concept. In Stage III, the students' performance was developed and no longer needed the assistance from teachers to utilize the new strategy or concept. Stage IV put students' learning in a longitudinal context, where students had learned many strategies and concepts and had to develop the capacity to perform more smoothly (Tharp & Gallimore, 1998).

Accelerating ESL students' reading with Accelerated Reader.

Despite numerous reports of success with AR, its effectiveness in producing a higher level of comprehension of achievement has not been universally accepted among scholars. Krashen (2002) complained that previous studies treated AR as a whole, and did not point out which aspects of the AR program were responsible for improvement in reading. With the mixed reports of the effectiveness in mind, McGlinn and Parrish (2002) conducted one of the few studies on using AR with elementary ESL students. The results of the study showed reading level increase did not occur for all the students, and could not conclude whether it was effective or ineffective.

However, positive changes brought to these ESL students by AR were encouraging enough for the authors to send recommendations for teachers to use AR with their ESL students.

McGlinn and Parrish (2002) observed that even the students who did not improve reading level demonstrated changes in their habits and attitudes. Despite limited success in tests, these students demonstrated engagement with the reading text and increased attempts to read. The changes in reading attitude were more significant in students with improved reading levels. In addition to increased reading levels, these students became more interested in reading and increased the number of books they read.

McGlinn and Parrish (2002) also pointed out how Accelerated Reader could be beneficial, regardless of its effectiveness to achieve reading progress. AR encourages reading, and consequently "benefits all students by getting them in the habit of reading" (p. 186). Students were made aware of their reading range in the ZPD section of the Star test, and became more independent in identifying readable books. Individualized goal setting, complimented with incentives, helped students to set reading goals for the week, and afforded them visible opportunities to experience success in reading. ESL could benefit from a school-wide implementation of AR. McGlinn and Parrish (2002) stated that "given the limited time students are in the ESL class, students need to be engaged in free reading through the school day" (p. 187), and that when students were encouraged to do free reading across the school, the ESL teacher could spend more time doing guided reading or "more hands-on activities and language experience stories which build both oral and written language" (p. 187).

Chapter 3: Project Design

In this chapter, I outline a workshop that uses the Renaissance Accelerated Reader (AR) program as a supplementary resource to improve student reading achievement. I also explain the rationale behind my choice of final project and provide a detailed description that enables readers to comprehend what the product is like, how it works, and how it can benefit the target audience. The actual product is presented in the next chapter.

Krashen (1993) stated that English Language Learners (ELL) in long-term voluntary reading projects outperform students in traditional ELL classes. McGlinn and Parrish (2002) similarly claimed that "free voluntary reading is one of the essential factors in language acquisition" (p. 177). Morrow (2003) concluded that the amount of time young children spend free reading is correlated with their reading achievement. Stairs (2010) reported that independent and self-selected reading improve middle school students' reading success. Ho and Choie (2005) found that even graduate students felt self-selected reading is more meaningful. It is evident that independent and self-selected reading is beneficial for students of all age groups.

Incorporating self-selected student reading is not as easy as it sounds. When students walk into a bookstore or library, they walk out with books which they will later find too difficult to read. Reading a book that is above their reading level is a painstaking process. Students get frustrated and do not look forward to the next library trip. This is especially true for ELLs who

are struggling in reading, because their reading level is normally below their interest level, which means they tend to select books that are interesting for their age group but they cannot read.

Many leveled reading programs have been designed to address these issues. Renaissance' AR program is the one that is presented in this paper because of its large existing presence at schools, both in the United States and in other countries. Naturally, the target audience of this workshop is English teachers whose students have direct or indirect access to the AR program.

Among the many features of AR that are presented in the workshop, the first important one is Star Reading, the initial placement test. The rationale behind this initial placement test is that before students self-select their independent reading books, they should be informed of their individual reading level. Star Reading is a computer-based non-stop reading test that consists of 34 multiple-choice questions. To test students' mastery of specific skills or state standards, the questions focus on various topics such as vocabulary, text comprehension, and literacy devices, and more.

The test takes students approximately 15-20 minutes to complete, and a targeted report is instantly available on the teacher's account. The GE section on the report indicates students' Grade Equivalent. For example, a score of GE: 2.9 is comparable to that of an average second grader after the ninth month of the school year. The Est. ORF section indicates students' Estimated Oral Reading Fluency. For example, a score of Est. ORF: 81 means that the student can likely read 81 words per minute correctly on grade level appropriate text. The most important score for students to note is ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development). For example, ZPD: 2.5-3.5 recommends that books within this AR value range provide optimal reading challenge without frustration.

After the initial placement test, the next step for the teacher is to set AR goals for students. Since Star Reading is intended to be done at the beginning of each quarter, teachers should start calculating AR point goals based on the reading expectations of the class. The AR system has goal setting recommendations built in, but the teacher is allowed to enter student AR goals manually. For example, if a student's ZPD is 2.0-3.0 and the student has 20 minutes of independent reading time, AR would suggest the student earn 0.7 AR points, on average, each week, and 6.3 points by the end of the quarter.

After students are made aware of their ZPD scores, the next step is to find appropriate books. A school with an established AR implementation mechanism would have a library or media center that has at least part of its book collections arranged by AR points. A student with a ZPD score of 2.0-3.0 can self-select books on the bookshelf marked 2.0-3.0. Classroom teachers are normally allowed to check out grade-level appropriate books with AR point designations so that students can have easier access. Teachers who have previously unmarked books can now have their own AR book collections by marking them based on the data provided by www.arbookfind.com. For example, if you enter the book *Dear Mr. Henshaw* (Cleary, 1983) into the website, you will see that it has a BL (Book Level) of 4.9, and you can put it in the 4.0-5.0 collection.

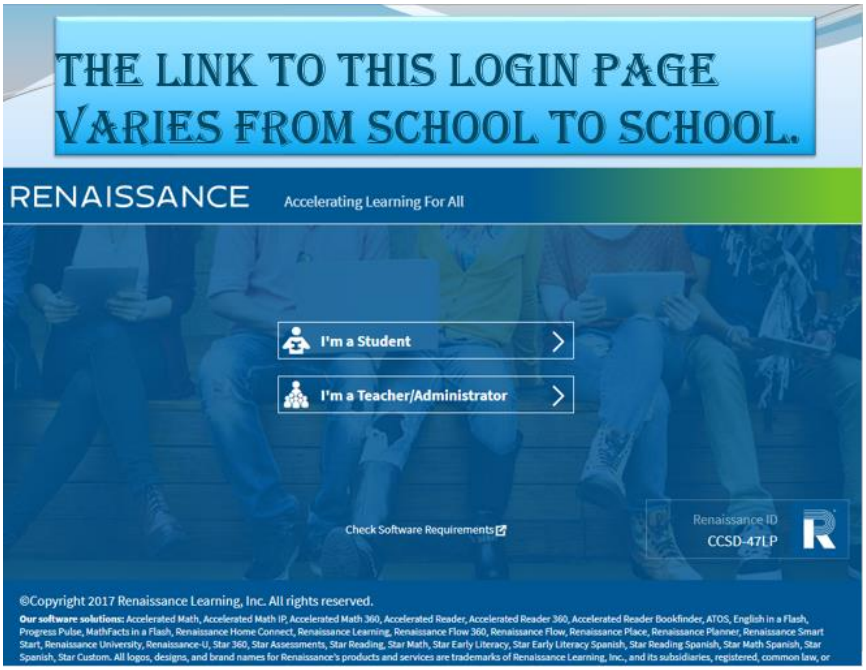
When a student finishes reading a book, they are encouraged to take the book quiz in the AR program. They should be made aware that they can only take the quiz for a certain book once and that if they answer fewer than 60% correct they will not get any points. Thus, they will have to read the book carefully instead of rushing through books and quizzes for points. AR book quizzes consist of 5, 10, or 20 multiple-choice questions depending on the complexity of the

book. When students earn enough book points to meet their goal, they deserve an award ceremony or other positive incentive offered by the teacher.

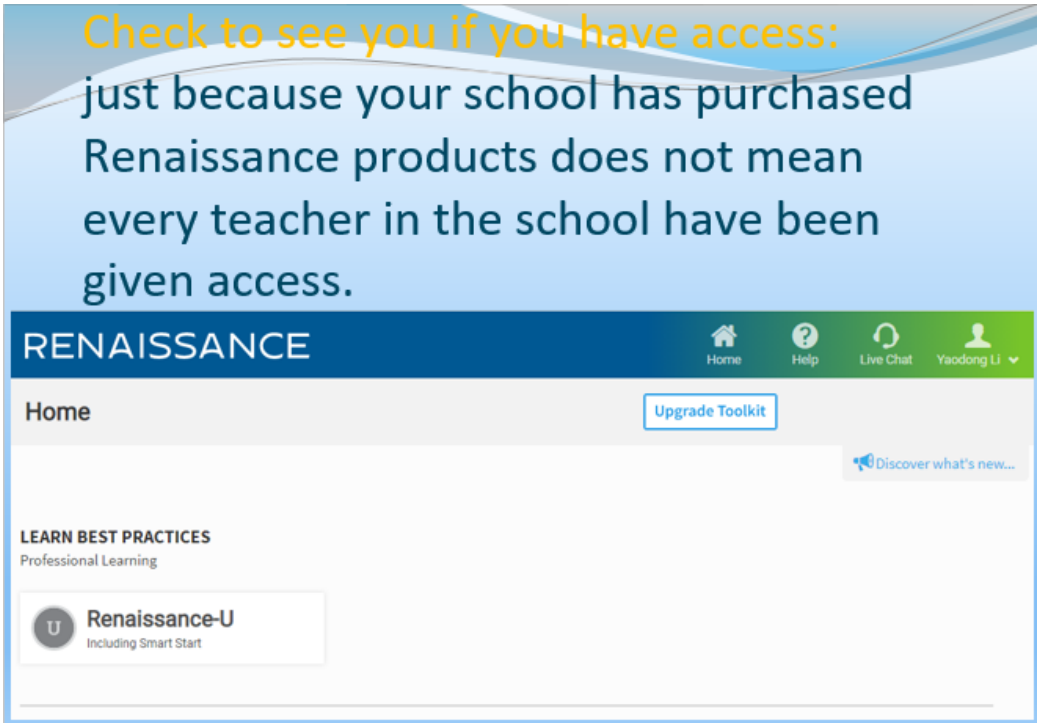
Chapter 4: The Project

This workshop is designed for teachers to use the Renaissance Accelerated Reader (AR) as a supplementary program to improve students' English reading comprehension. The potential benefits of AR have been discussed in previous chapters, and this chapter focuses strictly on the implementation of the program. This is not a commercial promotion for any Renaissance products, and the premise of the workshop is that the audience already have meaningful access to AR in their current school systems or organizations. It is also worth mentioning that AR should not replace regular classroom instruction or any remediation program offered by their school systems. This workshop is delivered with the support of the following PowerPoint slides.

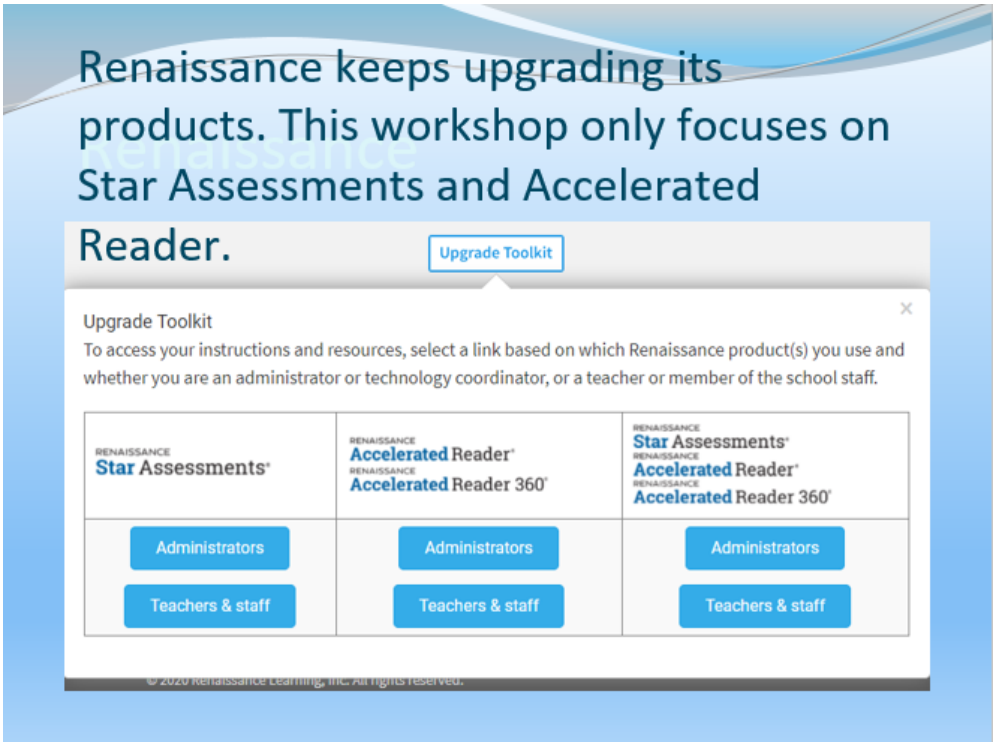
Slide #1 shows that AR is accessed through a unique website provided by the individual school instead of a universal website through the World Wide Web.



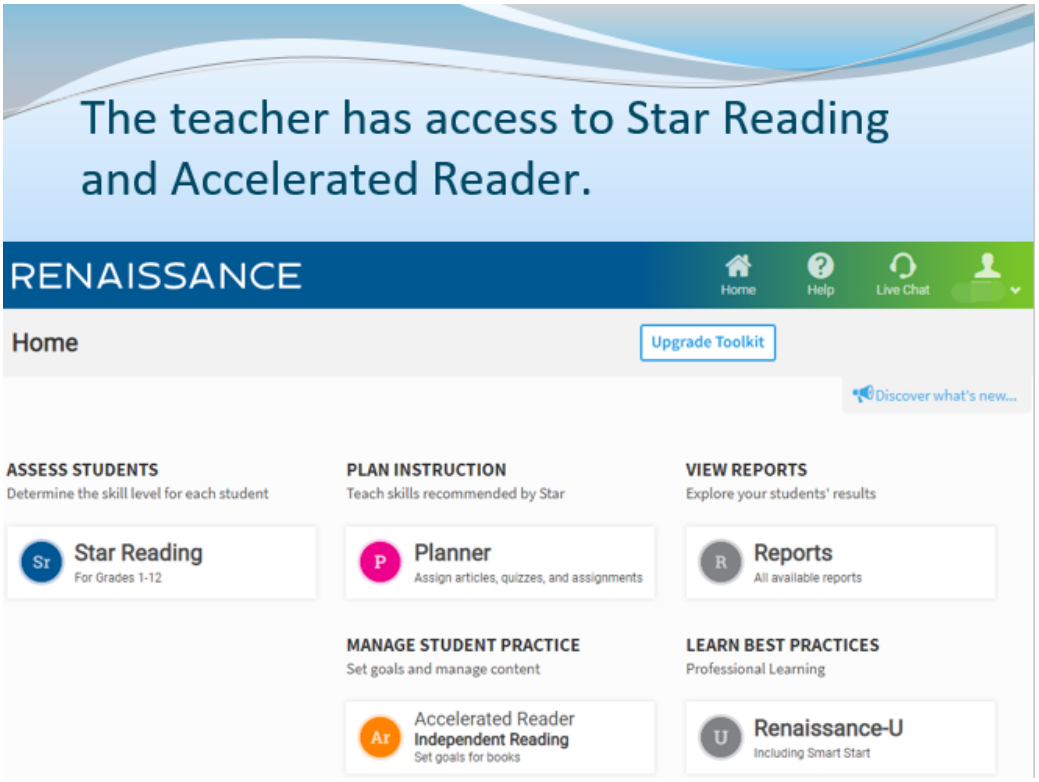
Slide # 2: The school administer may have given access to only higher grades (for example, access is not given to kindergarten grade level).



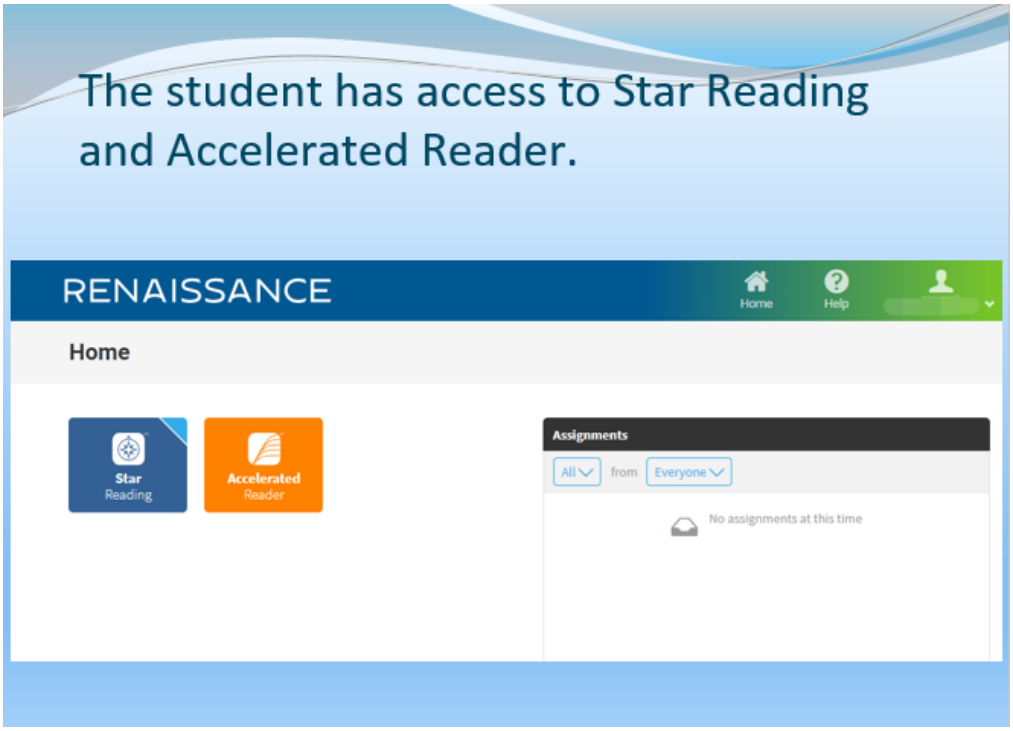
Slide #3: We only focus on two of the Renaissance reading products.



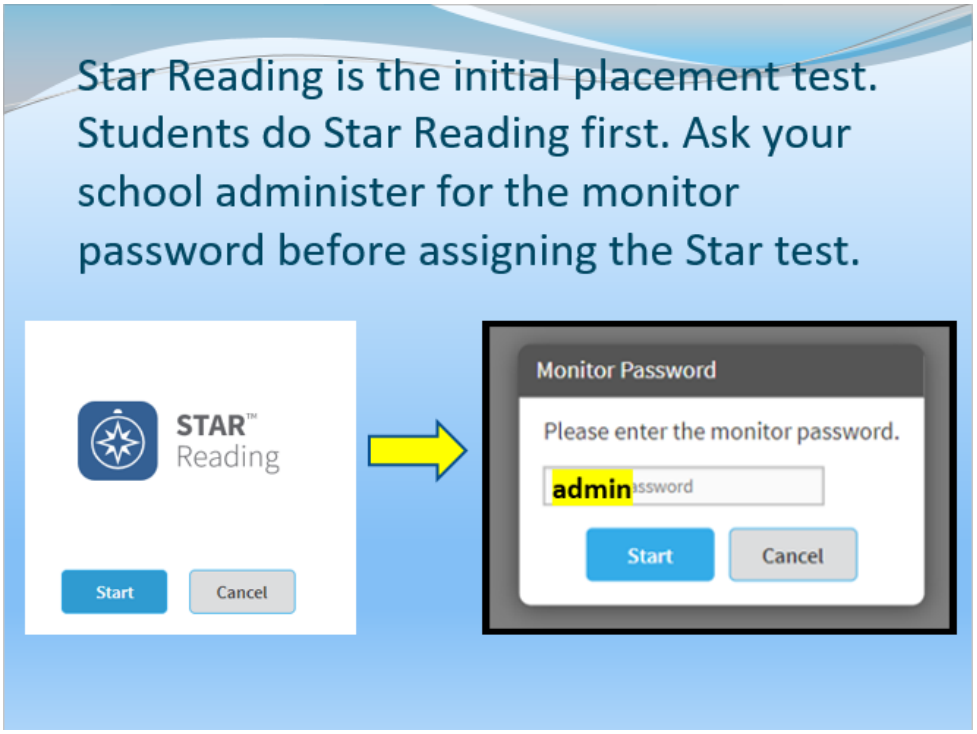
Slide # 4: Both Star Reading and Accelerated Reader are accessible by the teacher.



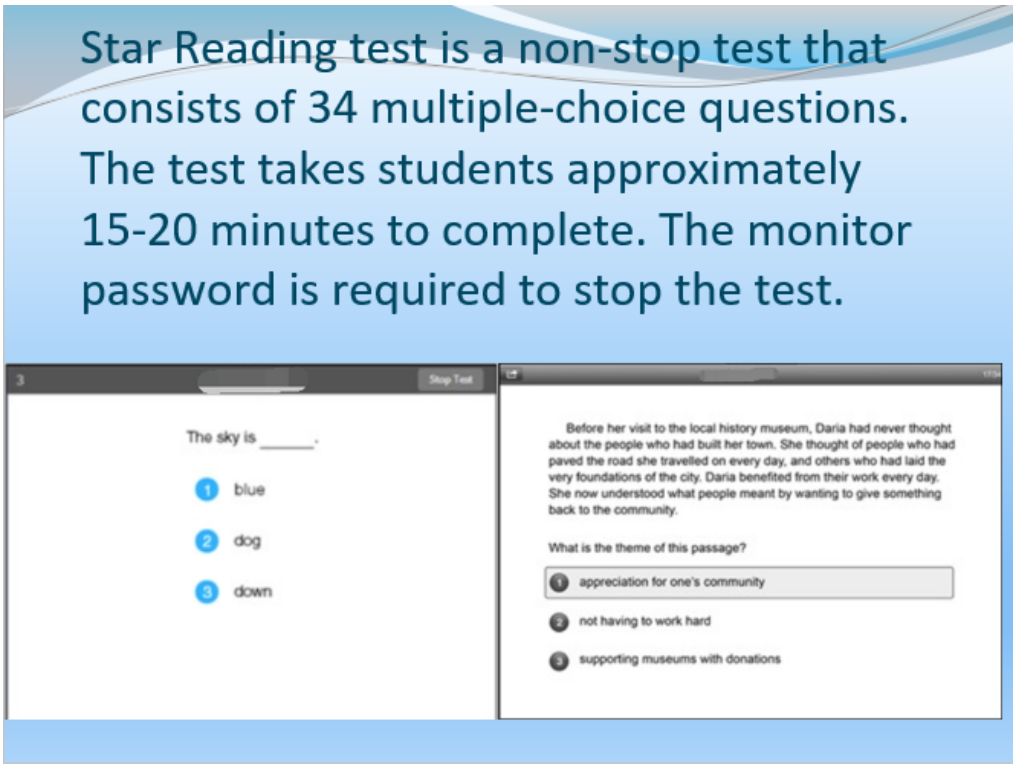
Slide #5: Both Star Reading and Accelerated Reader are accessible by the student.



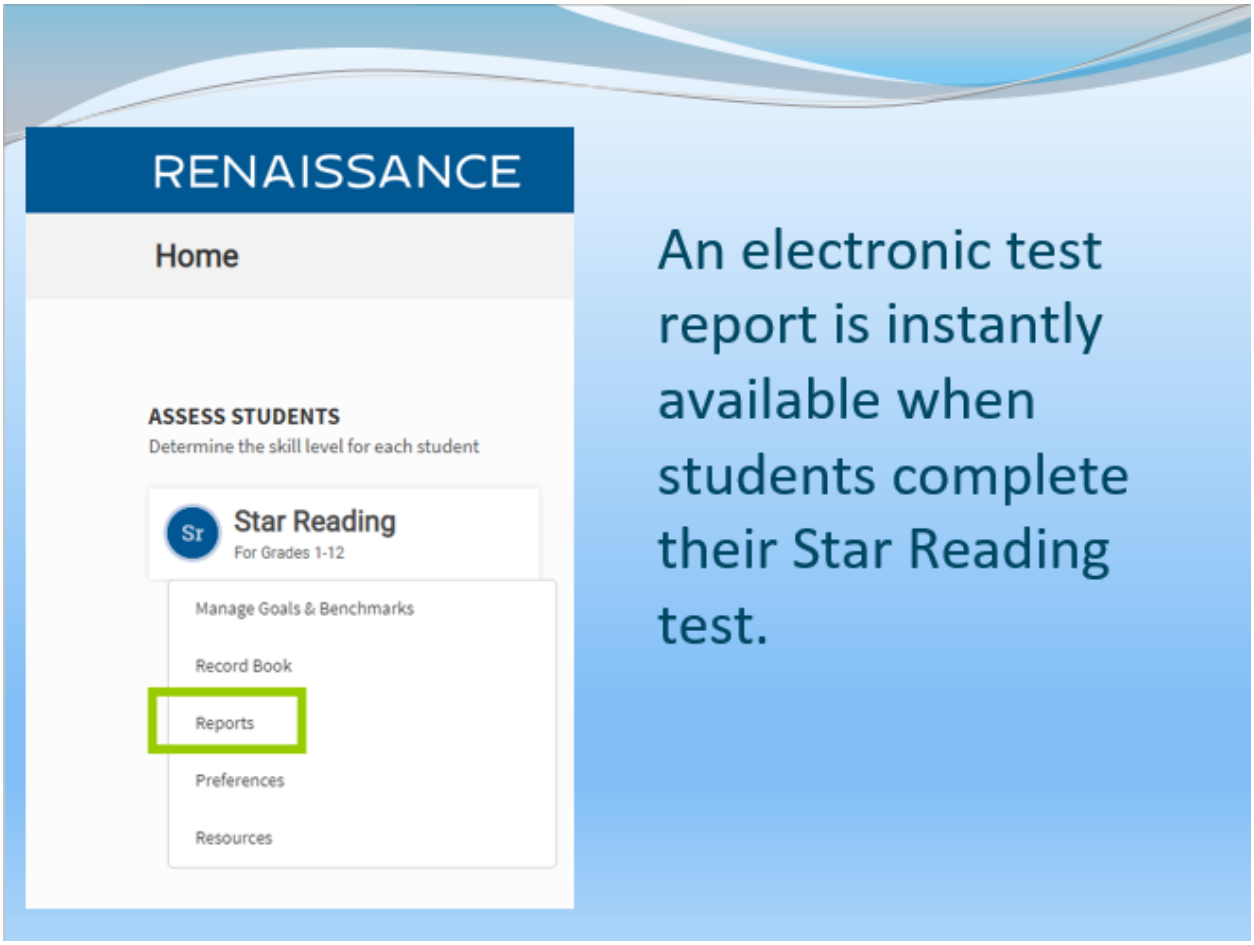
Slide #6: Have students complete Star Reading, the initial placement test.



Slide #7: Students cannot pause the test.



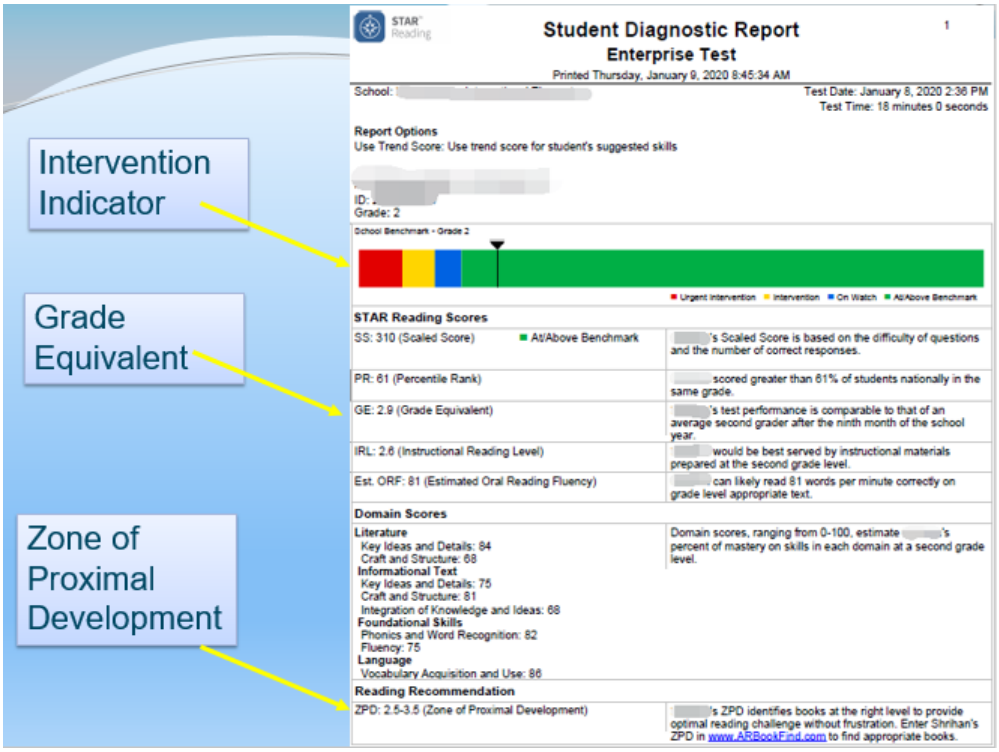
Slide #8: Run the student' Star Reading report.



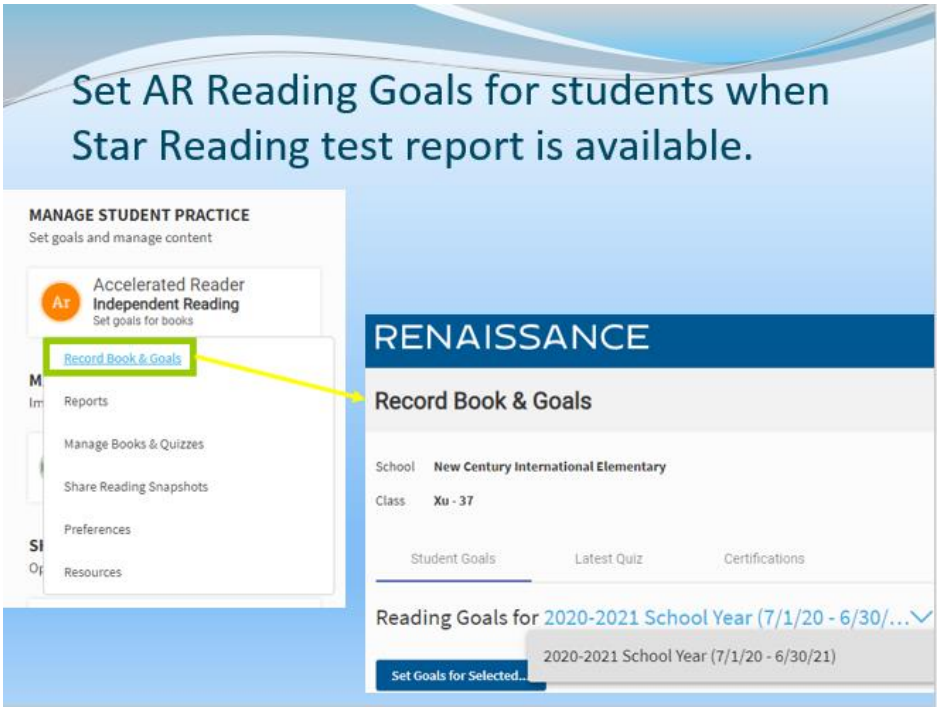
Side #9: A student's Star Reading diagnostic report. This initial placement report has detailed information in many aspects. Teachers are recommended to send the report to students and parents. Besides the intervention indicators, parents are generally interested to know the Percentile Rank, Grade Equivalent, and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) scores. Some parents are interested in the Est. ORF score, which estimates how many words the students can read correctly in a grade-level appropriate text.

Lower grades teachers should encourage students to make their own simplified version of this report which only shows their name and ZPD scores. With this copy in hand, students can

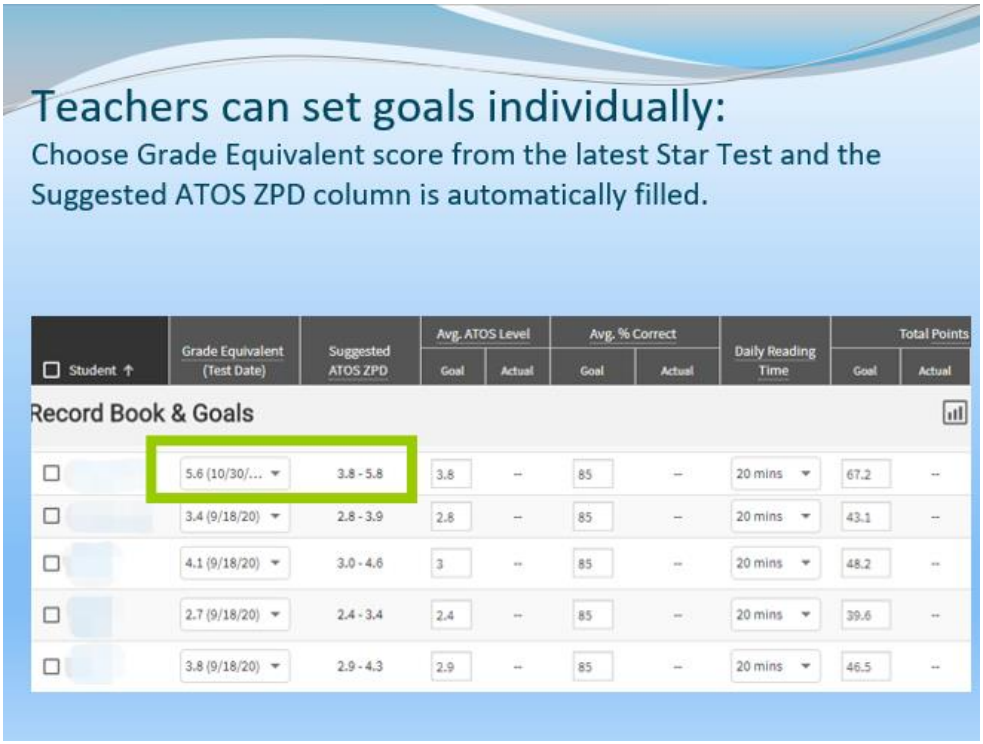
independently verify whether the AR reading level number on a book matches their individual reading level number on the report.



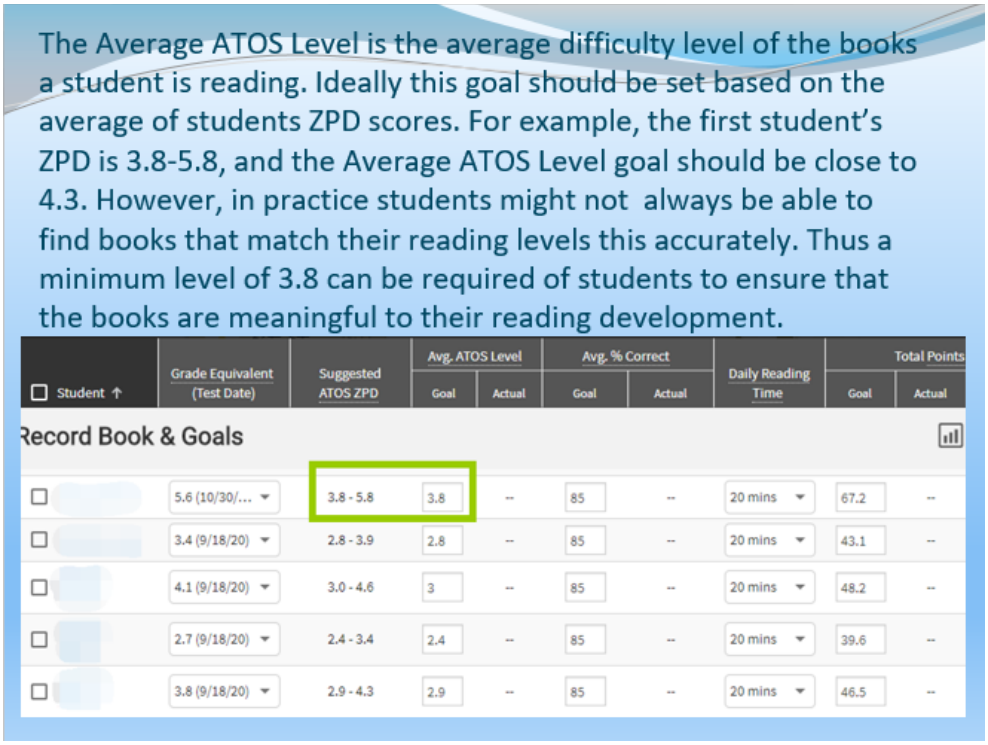
Slide #10: Set AR Reading Goals for the school year.



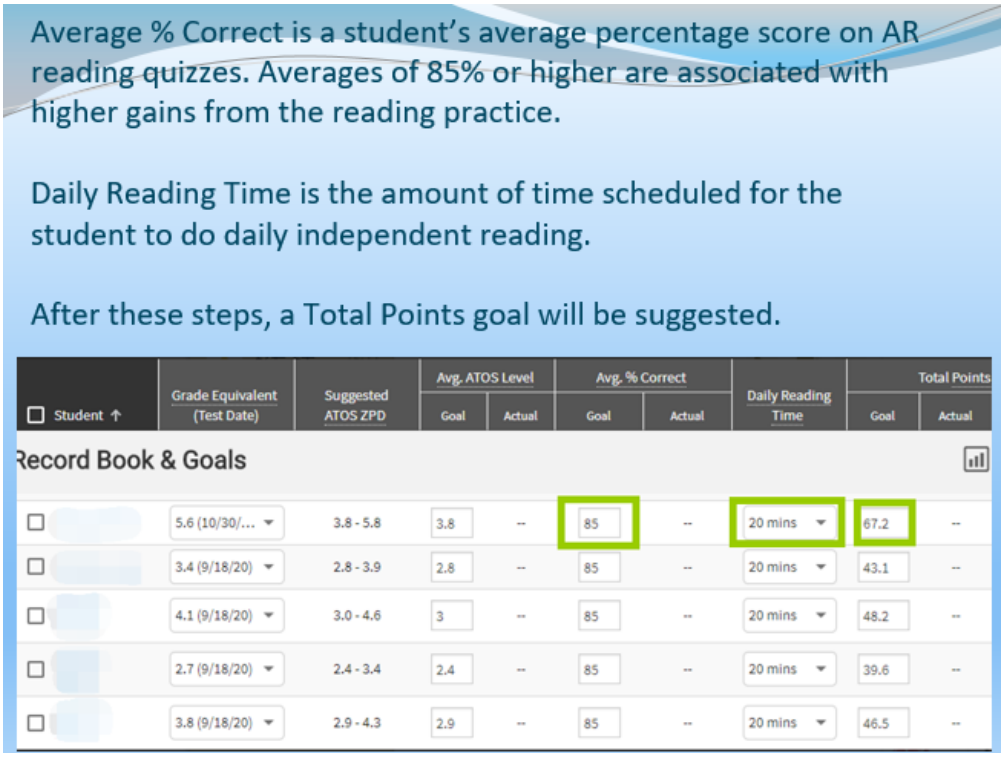
Slide #11: Choose the latest test date to generate Suggested ATOS ZPD range.



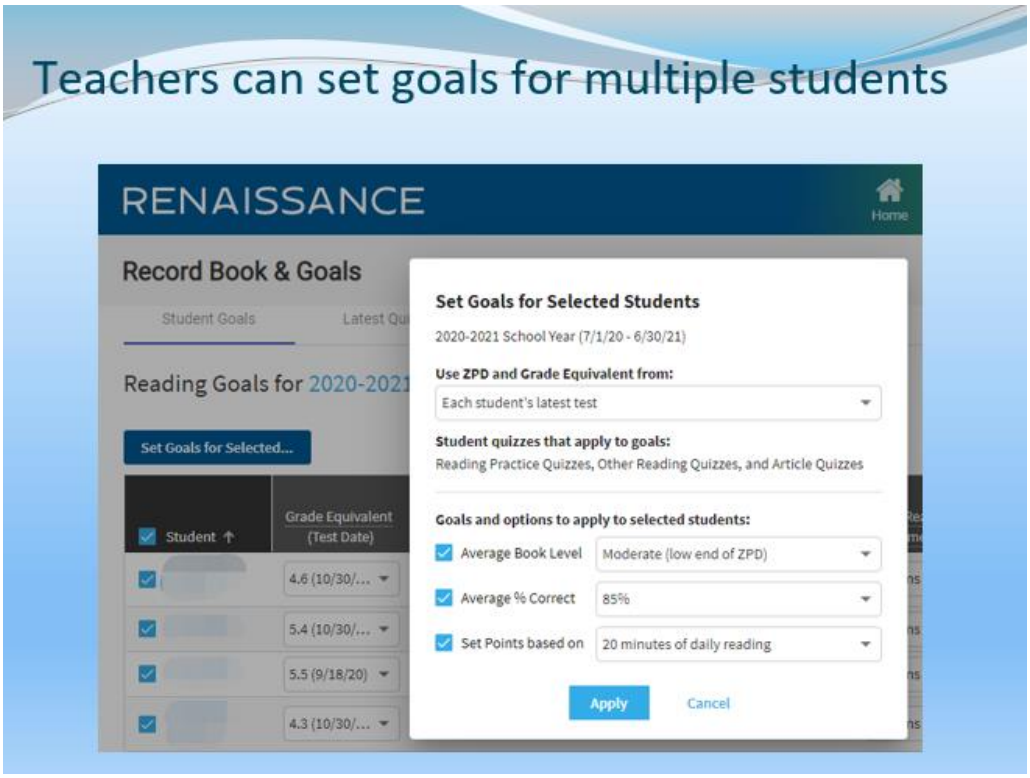
Slide # 12: Enter the student' Average ATOS Level goal.



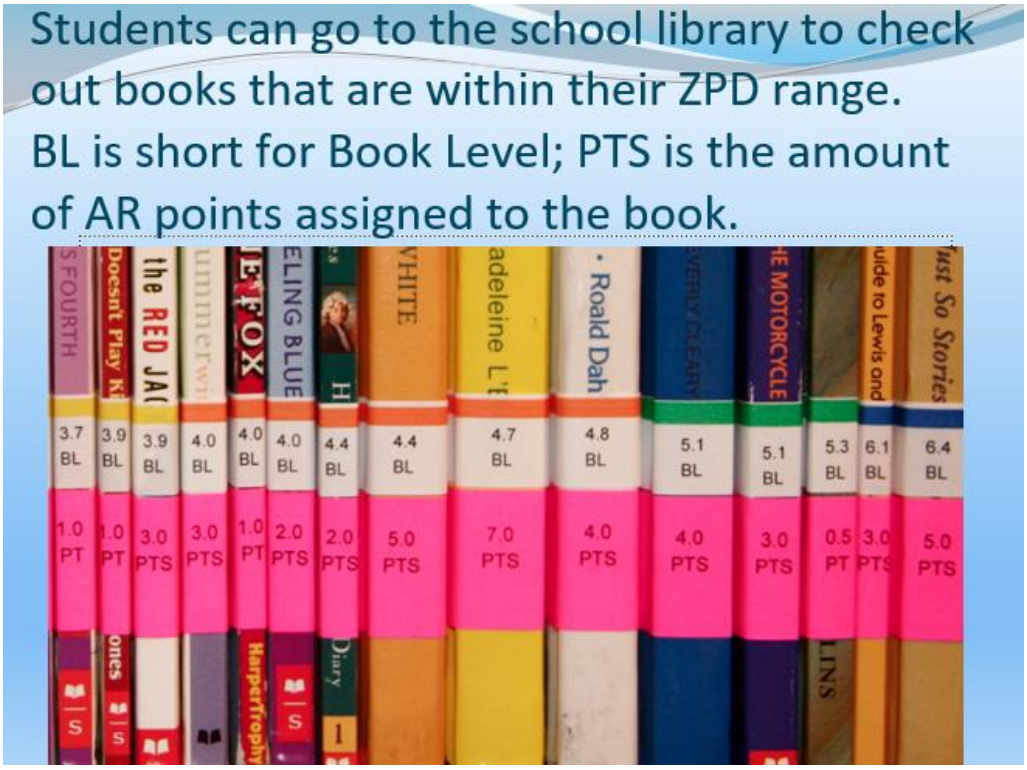
Slide # 13: Complete the goal setting steps for an individual student.



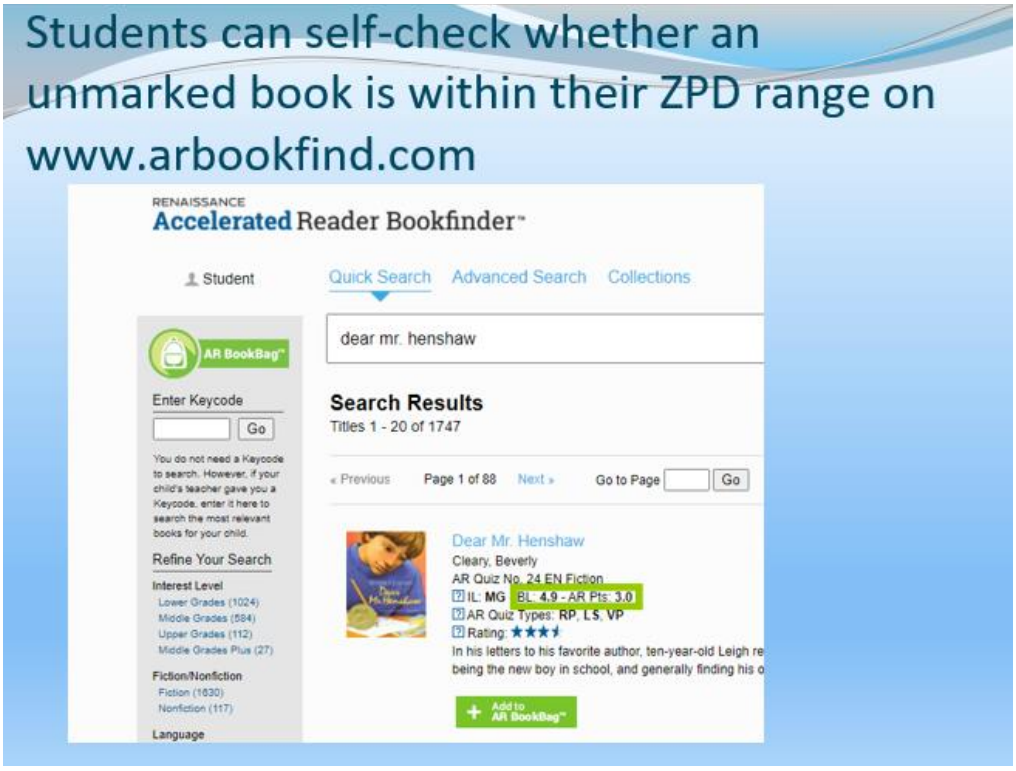
Slide # 14: Set goals for multiple students.



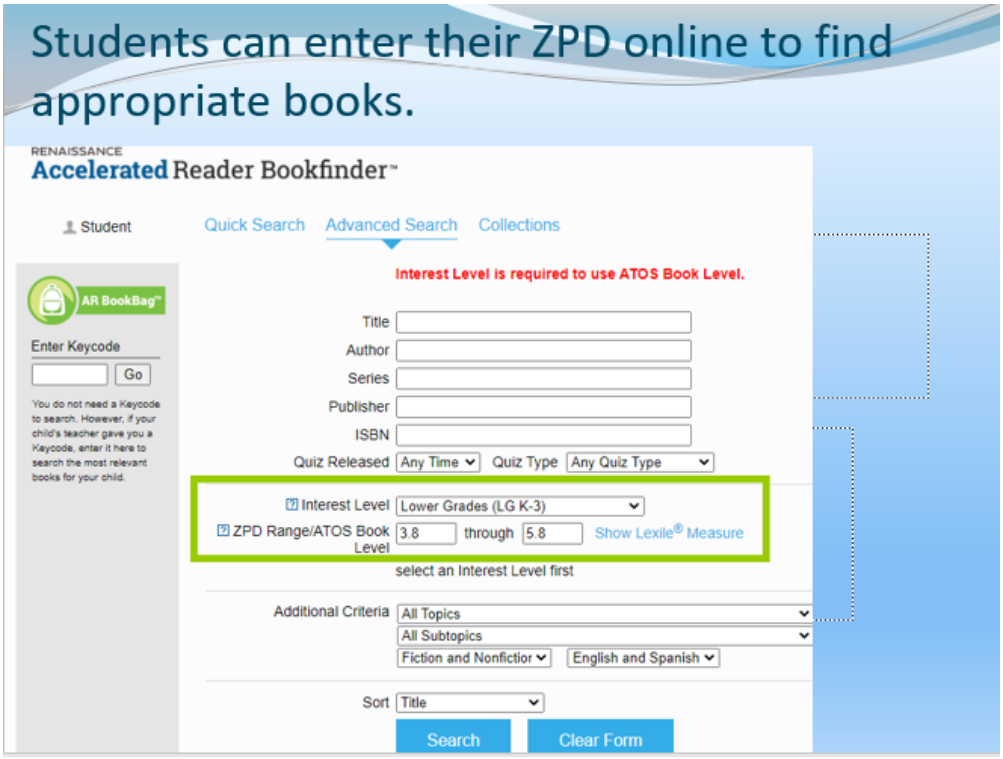
Slide #15: Students self-select books from the school library.



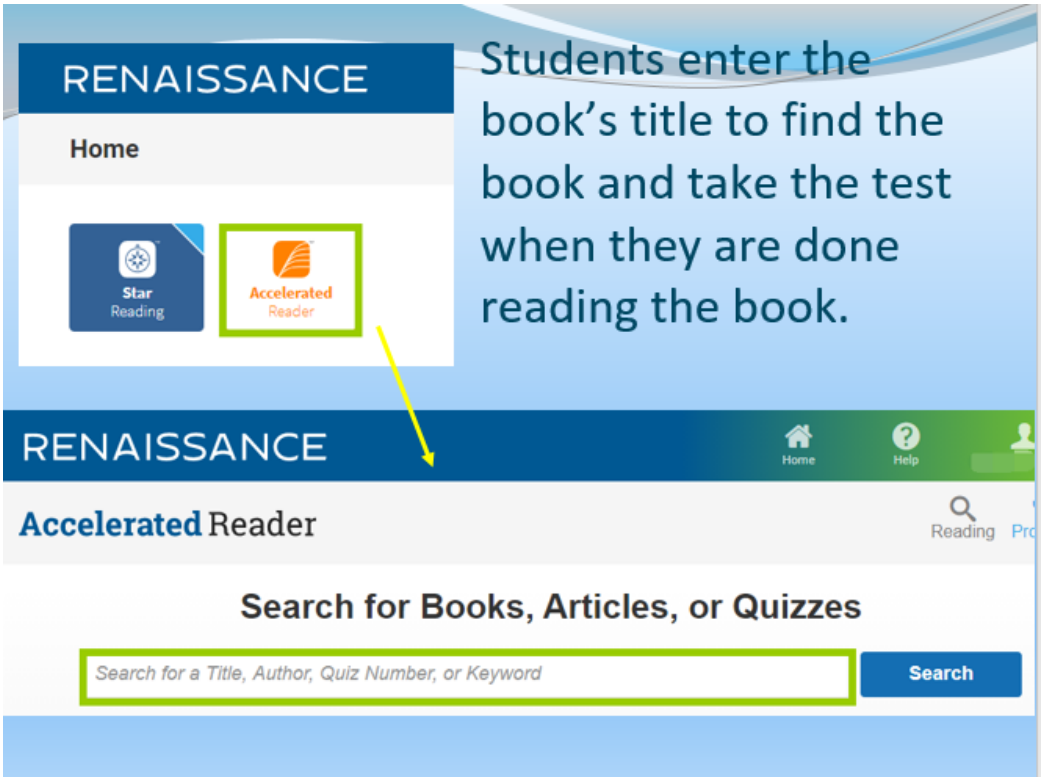
Slide #16: Students can check an unmarked book's AR book level online.



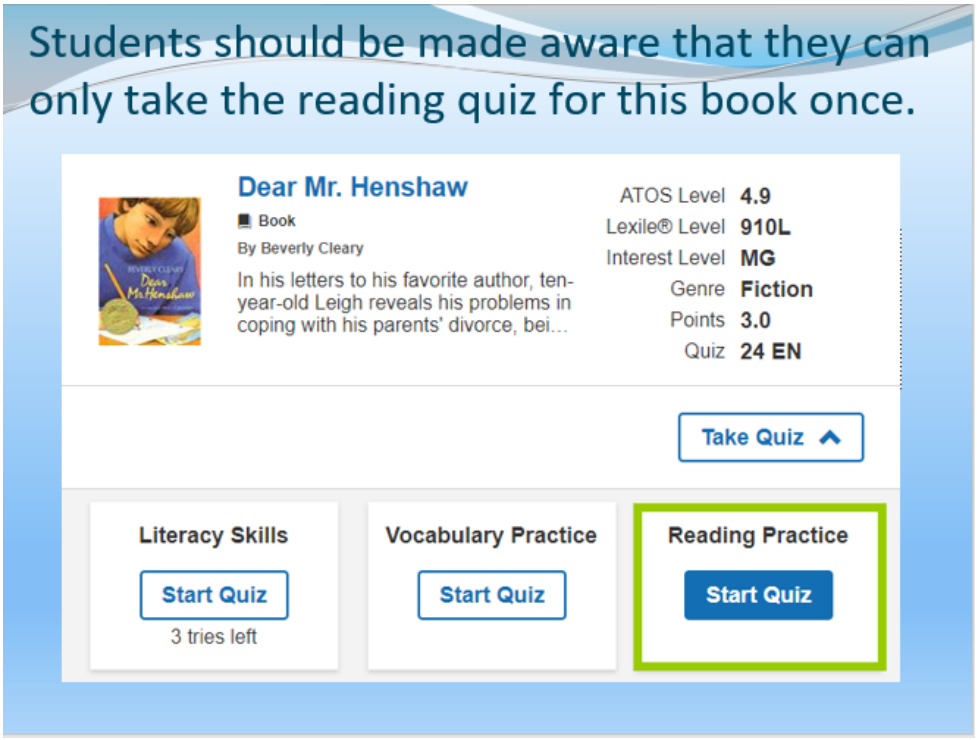
Slide #17: Students find more books to read.



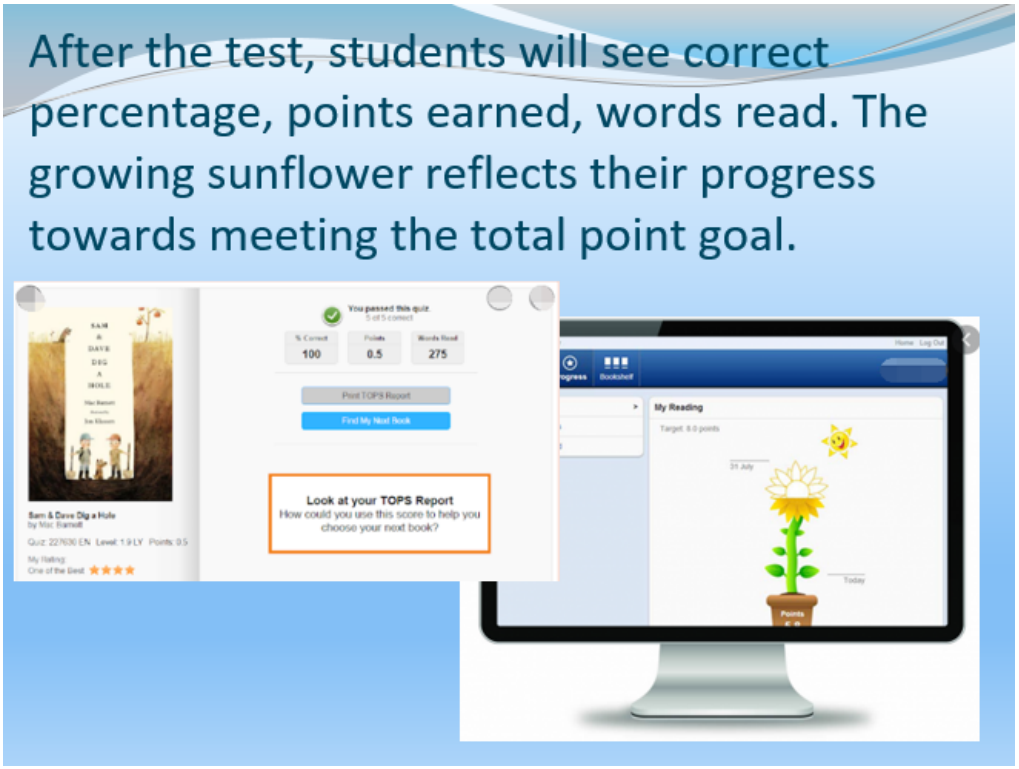
Slide #18: Students search for the book test when they finish reading the book.



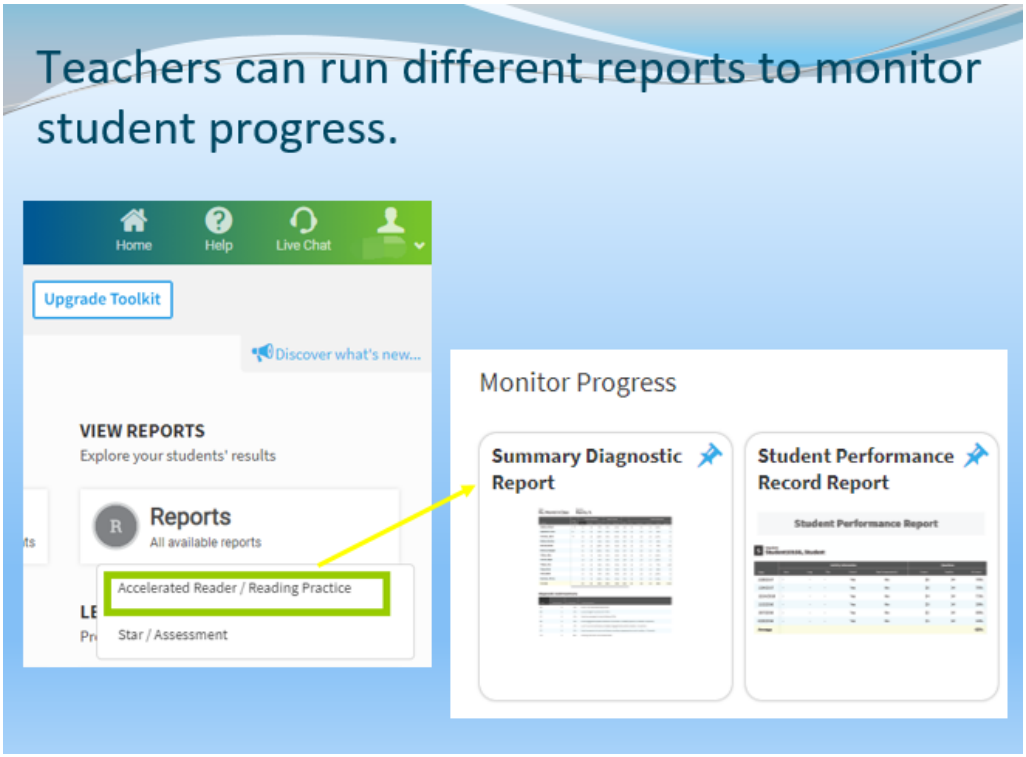
Slide # 19: Students cannot re-take a reading quiz.



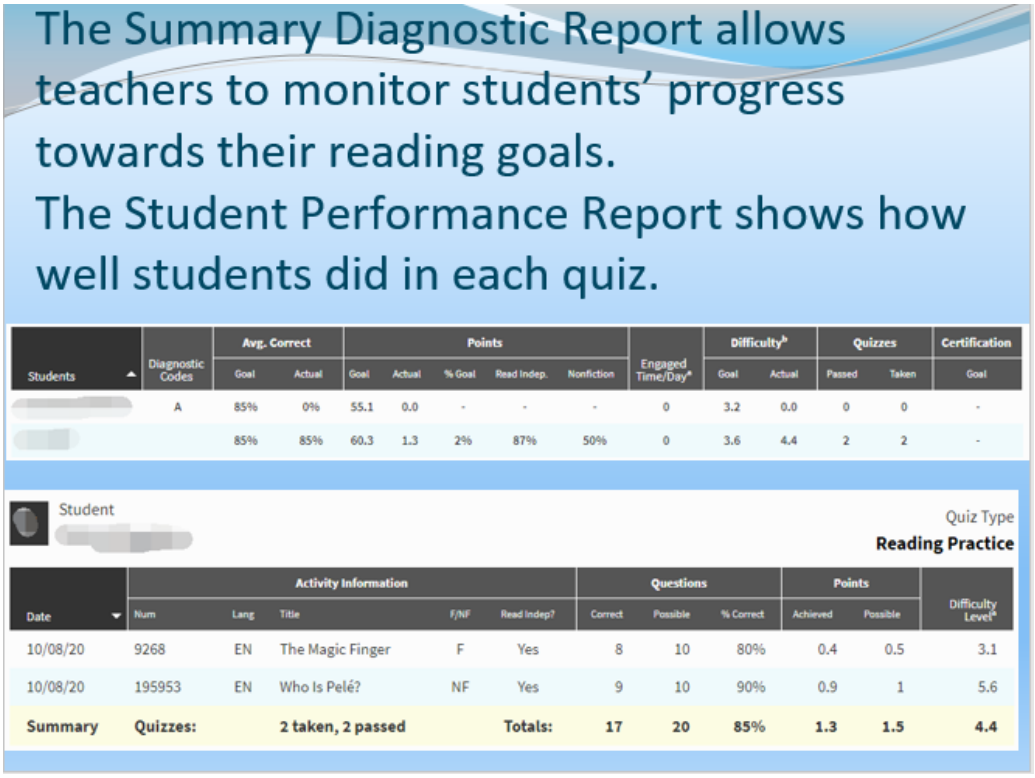
Slide #20: Students see their test result and watch their sunflower grow.



Slide #21: Teachers can run different reports of student's tests.



Slide #22: Teachers monitor student progress and test performance.



Slide #23: Teacher's recognition and appreciation keep students motivated.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Reading plays a fundamentally essential role in students' language achievements, whether in second language, foreign language, or native language. When students are in lower grades in elementary school, the focus of language tests is almost exclusively on reading. It does not matter how fluently first graders can speak English; they will receive a low grade as long as they cannot read grade-level texts. This narrow focus on reading may seem out of proportion to other factors of language, but this "tunnel vision" like practice is not unwarranted in terms of its significance in helping students achieve academic success in the long run. Poor reading performance at early age, if not remediated, is likely to cause bigger failure in secondary school.

The importance of mainstream classroom instruction and other school remediation programs is significant and needs no argument. In this paper, an option to help student improve reading that does not require school instruction hours is presented. The idea that more independent reading is beneficial to students' reading comprehension is not new. To encourage students to do more independent reading, however, is easier said than done because choosing the right books to read proves much more complicated than it sounds. Just because a book cover looks interesting to one does not mean one can read it. Students may ask the teacher for book recommendations, and the teachers may know a book or two to suggest, but no teacher is able to recommend two books a week to different individuals for a whole school year. This is where online reading management programs come in. It is worth noting that the Renaissance Accelerated Reader (AR) program is presented in this paper because of its large presence in

public schools, not because of the thesis presenter deems it of higher quality or efficiency compared to other similar products.

With the development of technology, these computer programs' databases become ever larger, and their readability formulas much more accurate. On the one hand, the AR program the designation of a book's readability can be specific to the ten months of a certain grade. For example, if a book is marked "BL 2.1", it means the book level is approximately right for 2nd graders in the 1st month. On the other hand, AR suggests a range of reading levels to students based on initial placement tests. For example, if the initial placement report suggests a reading range of 2.0-3.0, the student can choose any book that is designated a level between 2.0 and 3.0 and find it readable. This simple match of numbers enables students to choose their own reading independently regardless of their reading levels. Complemented with rewards, AR can be a great incentive for students to do more independent reading for more reading means more AR points which means more rewards.

The system of reading for rewards receives criticism as well as credits. Advocates argue that students, especially students who previously lack of interest to read, now find motivation to do more reading. Critics argue that students would read for the purpose of receiving rewards instead of reading for fun or for knowledge. Some scholars have questioned the efficacy of AR to improve students' reading performance. As of now, only a few studies have been done on the subject of the effectiveness of AR as a reading program, and these studies have not been able to draw a decisive conclusion that the implementation of AR results in significant increase in students' reading performance. The studies produced mixed results but there were promising signs that AR did increase the amount of time students were engaged in reading. More longitudinal studies are needed to examine the effectiveness of AR over long periods of time.

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